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Catholic Education, Faith and Authority

Katolickie wychowanie,
wiera i autorytet

ABSTRAKT

The text aims to show that authority and obedience are essential within Catholic education. In fact, Faith is “obedience” to the Truth as says the Second Vatican Council and the Truth is endowed with “authority” because God Himself is embodied in Jesus Christ. It is necessary to stress that – according to the Christian faith – this dependence upon God is not a kind of slavery but rather a loving relationship to the Father which sets humans free. This happens because man has an original dignity coming from his creation “in God’s image”. Catholic education must make people able to practice self-dominion (through the experience of authority) in order to choose only what is good so as to obey to the truth of human identity.

ABSTRACT

Tekst ma na celu wykazanie, że autorytet i posłuszeństwo są niezbędne w katolickim wychowaniu. W rzeczywistości wiara jest „posłuszeństwem” wobec Prawdy, jak mówi Sobór Watykański II, a prawda jest obdarzona „autorytetem”, ponieważ sam Bóg jest ucieleśniony w Jezusie Chrystusie. Konieczne jest wyjaśnienie, że – zgodnie z wiarą chrześcijańską – odwieczna zależność od Boga nie jest rodzajem niewolnictwa, ale miłosnym związkiem z Ojcem, czyniącym człowieka wolnym. Jest tak dlatego, ponieważ oryginalna godność człowieka pochodzi ze

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**III. Autorytet w teorii
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stworzenia go „na obraz Boży”. Wychowanie katolickie powinno nauczyć panowania nad sobą (w relacji z autorytetem), aby móc wybrać tylko to, co jest dobre i być wiernym prawdziwej istocie człowieka.

Generally speaking, people tend to distrust the word “authority”, because they fear being subdued by someone and giving up their freedom. The same thing happens in regard to “obedience”, which is considered not to be conducive for self-promotion and more useful to fear, cowardice, laziness – in short, something despicable.

Obviously, both authority and obedience can work in bad ways, but it isn't inevitable: actually, there are good meanings associated with both of them. For example, when people speak about someone really skilled, they name him/her “an authority in his/her own field”. In the same way, people speak of an “authentic interpretation” referring to a document coming from its author, the person most entitled to explain it: that is why he/she is an “authority”. It is possible to say something similar in reference to the term “obedience”. Certainly, it could concern servility and cowardice, but – actually – everyone loving someone else, aims to stay together for ever and promises obedience to conjugality, namely married life as “common yoke (Latin *jugum*, Gothic *juka*)” – otherwise what would conjugal fidelity mean? In the same way, obedience is required to the legitimate law, because it is essential to social order as well as compelled by obedience to the conscience too because it is the necessary foundation of personal morality.

We must therefore leave the clichés and not pay attention only to wrong practices in order to acknowledge the true and good meaning of both authority and obedience regarding human growth. My contribution starts from obedience because it is an essential reference within Christian faith and education.

The Second Vatican Council and the “obedience of faith”

The conciliar Constitution about Christian revelation is *Dei Verbum*. As often happens within ecclesiastical documents, the title is made from the opening words of the text, referring to the “Word of God” because, obviously, it takes inspiration from the Bible in order to

expose the main contents of Christian faith within the New Testament, but also related to the Old Testament too. It is interesting to notice that the first reference to the word “faith” is made by speaking about the “obedience of faith”,¹ in the letters of Paul (Romans 1: 5.16:26). What does the sentence mean? Something intrinsically paradoxical because faith is characterized by freedom, as the text says a bit later: “man commits his whole self freely to God, offering the full submission of intellect and will to God who reveals”. The quotation comes from the Constitution *Dei Filius* of the First Vatican Council (cap. III) which refers back to the well-known definition of faith by St. Augustine. He says that *fides est cum assentione cogitare*, that is “to have faith means to think with approbation”. St. Augustine points out: “Not each thinking person is a believer [...], but each believer also thinks, and by believing thinks as well as by thinking believes. [...] because faith, with no thought, is nothing (*quoniam fides si non cogitetur, nulla est*)”.²

At the end of the second Millennium, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* was published in order to expose Catholic doctrine not only methodically but also in a pedagogical way. Within the text, we can find: “By faith, man completely submits his intellect and his will to God. With his whole being man gives his assent to God the revealer. Sacred Scripture calls this human response to God, the author of revelation, ‘the obedience of faith’”.³ The last statement is explained this way:

To obey [...] in faith is to submit freely to the word that has been heard, because its truth is guaranteed by God, who is Truth itself. Abraham is the model of such obedience offered us by Sacred Scripture. The Virgin Mary is its most perfect embodiment.⁴

The core idea is the contemporary reference both to obedience and freedom. It could seem to be a paradox according to common mentality, but actually it is deeply relevant. In fact, to be free signifies acting in accordance with human dignity: “responsibility” means to “respond” (i.e., to correspond) to human identity by acting at the highest level of human dignity – so it involves recognising the *truth* of human dignity. That is why freedom needs obedience: it is a means, not an end

¹ Second Vatican Council, *Dei Verbum*, 5.

² Augustin, *The Predestination of Saints*, 2,5.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 143.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 144.



because the end is to promote human dignity as the deepest truth of human life.

In which way are faith and freedom mutually involved? This is a second paradox according to widespread agnosticism. From this point of view, it is necessary to recall that human freedom is always conditioned, i.e., it isn't unlimited. The same happens to faith: it is related to the limited cognitive power peculiar to the human creature. For this reason, faith and freedom meet each other, they are involved within the deepest human identity. We can infer that obedience, freedom and faith are strictly in a mutual connection.

We must follow this path because it is fundamental to education. I will start from some questions. The first is in which way is obedience involved with faith? First of all, faith is related to obedience because it is strictly connected to the act of listening. In Latin, the verb "to obey" (*oboedire*) comes from the verb "to listen" (*audire*) and the same happens in Polish too (*ustuchać* from *stuchać*). The Latin verb *oboedire*, being composed by *ob* (which means "cause") and *audire*, identifies the action made because something was heard (the same sense is within the Polish preposition *u* which means to be close also in reference to the cause). Actually, Biblical revelation is a call to listen, as it is clearly expressed by the Hebrew prayer *Shema Israel*: "Hear, o Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deuteronomy 6: 4–5). On the other hand, speaking about God's creation, *Genesis* describes God giving *verbal* orders and none is able to listen to them until the human being is created and receives the first blessing: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Genesis 1: 28). Unfortunately, the first disobedience occurred. The "original sin" means not only the mere disobedience to the Creator, but also to prefer creation to Him. Within *The City of God*, St. Augustine says that throughout history two different attitudes have been in conflict with one another:

the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God; the heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glories in itself, the latter in the Lord. For the one seeks glory from men; but the greatest glory of the other is God,

the witness of conscience. The one lifts up its head in its own glory; the other says to its God: "You are my glory, and the lifter up of my head." In the one, the princes and the nations it subdues are ruled by the love of ruling; in the other, the princes and the subjects serve one another in love, the latter obeying, while the former takes thought for all. The one delights in its own strength, represented in the persons of its rulers; the other says to its God: "I will love You, O Lord, my strength."⁵

Today we could be shocked by the open assertion of God's primacy but, if God is God, the opposite cannot be true; besides, in terms of the question of being a Christian God, He substantially loves human beings, so they can fully live only by living close to Him. About the subject, the Second Vatican Council says:

The truth is that only in the mystery of the incarnate Word does the mystery of man take on light. For Adam, the first man, was a figure of Him Who was to come, namely Christ the Lord. Christ, the final Adam, by the revelation of the mystery of the Father and His love, fully reveals man to man himself and makes his supreme calling clear. It is not surprising, then, that in Him all the aforementioned truths find their root and attain their crown.⁶

In short: the human creature, because of one's disobedience to God, actually chooses not to be in accordance to oneself because of the human constitutive dependence on God. Within the Bible, the word *'ādām* identifies not only the first human creature, but also mankind in general coming from the dust of the earth (*'ādāmā*), so something not precious at all (the word *humility* comes from the Latin *humilitas* in its turn coming from *humus*, "ground"). Everything noble comes to the human being from the divine "breath of life" (Genesis 2: 7). What does it mean? Without God, the human creature is nothing because the human being is strictly dependent upon God's will. Is it the same subordination which is proper to the slave? Both Ancient and Modern atheists supported such an idea and rejected God as an intolerable tyrant. Actually, the pagan religious idea of God was this one and ancient religious worship was practised in order to make the

⁵ Augustin, *The City of God*, XIV, 28.

⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et spes*, 22.



gods well-disposed towards their believers. The Christian idea of God is completely different because it refers to love, not fear.

The “obedience of faith” as “obedience of love” not “slave obedience”

Within his work *The Will to Power* Nietzsche says: “If there is God, then everything is under His will and I am nothing outside His will. If He doesn’t exist, everything depends from me and I must show my independence.”⁷ According to Nietzsche, it is necessary to reject God in order to recognize the real existence of the human being. Actually, this argument is consequent to the ancient/pagan idea of God as it was recognized also by Schleiermacher and Otto as referring every religion to the absolute dependence from God only as a kind of servile subordination. According to this idea, there is no relationship from God to mankind as the Aristotelian “Unmoved Mover” is strictly self-sufficient. The same is true of the Neoplatonic “the One” who is absolutely not involved with creation so that the world comes from God, but God has no consciousness of it, being an “emanation” not “creation”. This idea of God – as it was said first by Anaxagoras – recognizes God as Intelligence but not as Will. God is recognized as Intelligence because of the structural order of the world, but it isn’t recognized as Will because – according to the pagan idea of God – God, being perfect, can neither be in relation to the world nor can He love it. We must remember that – according to the Greek conception – love is *éros* so it means to lack something and to take it. Obviously, God being perfect, He needs nothing, so He can’t love. It is the same idea professed by ancient Gnosis and it is not by chance that the first Christian theological struggle was against Gnosis.

In fact, the Christian idea of God is just the opposite. Jesus says that God is the Father. First of all, obviously, He is the Father of the Son, but, within the prayer taught by Jesus to his disciples, God is named “Our Father” (Matthew 6: 9–13 and Luke 11: 2–4). The strongest testimony comes from John 15: 15, regarding the last speech of Jesus, when he says to his disciples: “No longer do I give you the name of servants; because a servant is without knowledge of what his

⁷ F. Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 334.

master is doing: I give you the name of friends, because I have given you knowledge of all the things which my Father has said to me.” In fact, right from St. John comes the strongest statement about the subject we are dealing with: I refer to his First Letter saying that “God is love” (1 John 4: 8.16). Not only Intelligence, but also Love; not because Jesus’ God isn’t perfect, but because He is so perfect that He wants to love mankind and all creation. In fact, as it is written both in the Old Testament and the New, one of God’s names is *Immanuel*, “God-with-us” (Isaiah 7: 14.8,8; Matthew 1: 23): so, God is involved within human history, because He loves humanity. That is why, even if – in theory – being God “the Being” (Exodus 3: 14), only He should be; in practice, because of His Will, creatures really exist too, and the human being is called to be God’s *partner*. I do not use the word by chance because one of the most recurring images in the Bible, in order to describe the relation between God as Creator and the human creature, is precisely the conjugal image.

We are so used to living within a Christianized culture that we are at risk of not being able to recognize what is derived from evangelization in favour of human happiness and fullness anymore. For example, according to the Platonic, Neoplatonic and Gnostic mind, the material side of things only seems to be, but actually doesn’t exist. On the contrary, from the beginning, from the Biblical description of creation, the material world is recognized as “good”. The same is true of the human being, endowed since the very beginning with a body. That is why in 1 Corinthians St. Paul says to Christians: “let God be honoured in your body” (6: 20); and – later – Cyril of Jerusalem:

Do not believe those who say that this body is not the work of God: for they who believe that the body is independent of God, and that the soul dwells in it as in a strange vessel, readily abuse it to fornication. And yet what fault have they found in this wonderful body? For what is lacking in comeliness? And what in its structure is not full of skill? Ought they not to have observed the luminous construction of the eyes? And how the ears being set obliquely receive the sound unhindered? And how the smell is able to distinguish scents, and to perceive exhalations? And how the tongue ministers to two purposes, the sense of taste, and the power of speech? How the lungs placed out of sight are unceasing in their respiration of the air? Who imparted the incessant pulsation of the



heart? Who made the distribution into so many veins and arteries? Who skilfully knitted together the bones with the sinews? Who assigned a part of the food to our substance, and separated a part for decent secretion, and hid away the unseemly members in more seemly places? Who when the human race would have died out, corrected this by allowing intercourse? Tell me not that the body is a cause of sin. For if the body is a cause of sin, why does not a dead body sin? Put a sword in the right hand of one just dead, and no murder takes place. Let beauties of every kind pass before a youth just dead, and no impure desire arises. Why? Because the body sins not of itself, but the soul through the body. The body is an instrument, and, as it were, a garment and robe of the soul. [...] Take care, therefore, of your body as being a temple of the Holy Spirit. Pollute not your flesh in fornication: defile not what is your fairest robe: and if ever you have defiled it, now cleanse it by repentance: get yourself washed, while time permits.⁸

Until this point I have been concerned with the original relationship between God and man, asserting that the latter needs the former more than everything else: the opposite of Nietzsche's argumentation. But there is another question, namely about the kind of relationship between them: is it slavery or something else? It could be possible to have doubts, especially because of the common statement related to the last of the Holy Spirit's gifts: the "fear of the Lord". What does it mean? We must remember that man's relation with God, according to the Christian faith, is the relation to the Father. It is interesting to notice that when Jesus speaks about the Father to his disciples, he makes use of the word *abba* meaning "dad", which identifies paternity not from the formal point of view (as "father"), but from the familiar/loving point of view. For this reason, the "fear of the Lord" isn't *terror* towards Him (a feeling which keeps us at a distance from Him), but the *concern* that one might lose God's love and the *desire* to stay closer and closer to Him. Both in Ancient Greek and in Latin we have the same possibility – as in English – to distinguish those two different attitudes. On one side, the two words are, respectively, *phóbos* and *déos*; on the other, *metus* and *timor*: precisely, *timor Dei* is the "fear of the Lord". So, Christian dependence on God is related to that of a beloved father, not

⁸ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechism*, IV, 22–23.

to that of a master we are afraid of. This is a very important elucidation because it makes clear that to be Christian means to be freed from slavery because – as St. Paul says – a Christian believer is “adopted child” of God:

And all those who are guided by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not get the spirit of servants again to put you in terror, but the spirit of sons was given to you, by which we say, *Abba*, Father. The Spirit is witness with our spirit that we are children of God: and if we are children, we have a right to a part in the heritage; a part in the things of God, together with Christ; so that if we have a part in his pain, we will in the same way have a part in his glory (Romans 8: 14–17).

Now I focus on the subject.

From the Gospel, we are called to live as “children of God”

Today we are experiencing increasingly diffused religious pluralism related to the contemporary religious indifferentism. Some people have no consciousness of the importance of being Christian, others are against the Christian faith or in favour of a “Christian” identity which is no longer linked to the Church – this attitude isn’t Christian any more, actually. That’s why we must show the originality of Christian faith. It is necessary both to avoid confusion and to allow the choice with full awareness. In fact, it is too easy to charge the Christian faith with responsibilities that do not depend on it, even if – through history – Christian people also obviously acted badly because of the human tendency to commit sins. In terms of the false opposition to the Christian faith I would give two examples: the attitude toward the body and the natural environment.

In terms of the first subject, I have just remarked on the Christian positive attitude not only toward the body or the soul, but the *unity* of the body and the soul within the human person. Nietzsche was also violently against the Christian faith from this point of view but it is symptomatic that he named Christian faith “a kind of Platonism useful to the people”. Actually, even if Platonic philosophy affected Christian theology (something completely predictable, because it was the strongest philosophy of the time), it never turned Christian faith into



“a kind of Platonism” because its strongest article of faith – the Incarnation and Resurrection of Jesus – had no meaning to the Platonic mind. This statement is confirmed from the dialogue between St. Paul and the Greek philosophers at the Athenian Areopagus when they said they were not interested in a faith with the resurrection of the flesh (Acts 17: 32). Later, the problem continued as confirmed by Origen’s testimony of the pagan prejudice about the resurrection of the flesh as “a belief worthy of earthworms”.⁹ Actually, Christian faith on the issue is related to the faith in the Holy Spirit as the dynamic Agent within Christian salvation. St. Paul makes use of a natural image to explain this belief:

So is it with the coming back from the dead. It is planted in death; it comes again in life; it is planted in shame; it comes again in glory: feeble when it is planted, it comes again in power: it is planted a natural body; it comes again as a body of the spirit. If there is a natural body, there is equally a body of the spirit (1 Corinthians 15: 42–44).

We must not forget that Christian faith – at the beginning – contended with Mary’s full maternity of Jesus, similar to every other gestation except the beginning: the aim was to defend the true event of the Incarnation and the true flesh of Jesus.

The accusation about the exploitation of natural resources is also false. In fact, being God’s creature, man is answerable to Him with regard to his conduct even if, being made in “God’s image”, man and woman have the possibility to act much more than anyone else, but always as subordinate co-operators to God’s creation, not as self-representative ones. Thus it is possible to infer that Biblical faith before and Christian faith after both put humans under God’s command to take care of the natural environment, not to destroy it (Genesis 1: 28).

It is essential to be aware of the true identity of Christian anthropocentrism as the responsibility toward the creation before God. Pope Francis clearly explains it within his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’*:

This responsibility for God’s earth means that human beings, endowed with intelligence, must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world, for

⁹ Origen, *Against Celsus*, V, 14.

'he commanded and they were created; and he established them for ever and ever; he fixed their bounds and he set a law which cannot pass away' (Psalms 148: 5b–6). The laws found in the Bible dwell on relationships, not only among individuals but also with other living beings. 'You shall not see your brother's donkey or his ox fallen down by the way and withhold your help [...]. If you chance to come upon a bird's nest in any tree or on the ground, with young ones or eggs and the mother sitting upon the young or upon the eggs; you shall not take the mother with the young' (Deuteronomy 22: 4, 6). Along these same lines, rest on the seventh day is meant not only for human beings, but also so 'that your ox and your donkey may have rest' (Exodus 23: 12). Clearly, the Bible has no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism unconcerned for other creatures.¹⁰

Obviously, this kind of attitude fails because of the crisis of faith:

Modern anthropocentrism has paradoxically ended up prizing technical thought over reality, since the technological mind sees nature as an insensate order, as a cold body of facts, as a mere 'given', as an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere 'space' into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference. The intrinsic dignity of the world is thus compromised. When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves: not only has God given the earth to man, who must use it with respect for the original good purpose for which it was given, but, man too is God's gift to man. He must therefore respect the natural and moral structure with which he has been endowed. Modernity has been marked by an excessive anthropocentrism which today, under another guise, continues to stand in the way of shared understanding and of any effort to strengthen social bonds. The time has come to pay renewed attention to reality and the limits it imposes; this in turn is the condition for a more sound and fruitful development of individuals and society. An inadequate presentation of Christian anthropology gave rise to a wrong understanding of the relationship

¹⁰ Francis, *Laudato si'*, 68.



between human beings and the world. Often, what was handed on was a Promethean vision of mastery over the world, which gave the impression that the protection of nature was something that only the faint-hearted cared about. Instead, our ‘dominion’ over the universe should be understood more properly in the sense of responsible stewardship.¹¹

According to Christian faith, human dignity is full, but not self-sufficient. Actually, it is related not only to the creation “in God’s image” (Genesis 1: 27), but also to the adoption in Christ made by God. Here is the very “good news” coming from evangelization, well expressed by Pope Leo I:

Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and becoming a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct. Remember the Head and the Body of which you are a member. Recollect that you were rescued from the power of darkness and brought out into God’s light and kingdom. By the mystery of Baptism you were made the temple of the Holy Ghost: do not put such a denizen to flight from you by base acts, and subject yourself once more to the devil’s slavery: because your purchase money is the blood of Christ.¹²

These sentences are anticipated by Gregory of Nyssa’s censure about the pagan and philosophical concept of “microcosm”:

Let us now resume our consideration of the Divine word, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness’ (Genesis 1: 26). How mean and how unworthy of the majesty of man are the fancies of some heathen writers, who magnify humanity, as they supposed, by their comparison of it to this world! For they say that man is microcosm, composed of the same elements with the universe. Those who bestow on human nature such praise as this by a high-sounding name, forget that they are dignifying man with the attributes of the gnat and the mouse: for they too are composed of these four elements – because assuredly about the animated nature of every existing thing we behold a part, greater or less, of those elements without which it is not natural that any sensitive being should exist.

¹¹ Francis, *Laudato si’*, 115–116.

¹² Leo I, *Sermon, XXI (On the Feast of the Nativity)*, 3.

What great thing is there, then, in man's being accounted a representation and likeness of the world – of the heaven that passes away, of the earth that changes, of all things that they contain, which pass away with the departure of that which compasses them round? In what then does the greatness of man consist, according to the doctrine of the Church? Not in his likeness to the created world, but in his being in the image of the nature of the Creator.¹³

As much dignity and as much responsibility: the human being must act at the (high) level of one's proper value. It isn't easy to learn this way of acting, but it is possible. How? By relation to the educational authority which makes us able to act as "children of God".

How does authority make someone free?

To be children means to act at the (high) level of filial dignity

The reference to Christian filial identity is well represented within contemporary theological studies¹⁴ also because Pope John Paul II directly combined the new evangelization and the announcement God's indefectible love toward man:

Humanity is loved by God! This very simple yet profound proclamation is owed to humanity by the Church. Each Christian's words and life must make this proclamation resound: God loves you, Christ came for you.¹⁵

To preach God's love is essential in order to combine two tensional statements which are always under strain: law and freedom, divine law and human freedom. How to be free without being licentious? How to lead without being tyrants and enemies to human dignity? A statement by St. Paul gives us good advice: "We are free to do all things, but there are things which it is not wise to do. We are free to do all things, but not all things are for the common good" (1 Corinthians 10: 23). The son and the daughter are free to do all they want because to be children means not to be slave. Obviously, I am referring here to the ancient

¹³ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, 16.

¹⁴ Cf. R. Tremblay, S. Zamboni (ed.), *Synowie w Synu. Teologia moralna fundamentalna*, Warszawa 2009; A.M. Jerumanis, *In Cristo, con Cristo, per Cristo*, Roma 2013.

¹⁵ John Paul II, *Christifideles laici*, 34.



world and in this context it is interesting to notice that the Latin adjective *ingenuus* means “free”, being referred to the one living within the family (*gens*), like the Greek adjective *ghennaios* referred to *ghénos* (“family”): the slave is such because he isn’t part of the family but must serve it. Today’s society is very different and fortunately slavery was abolished, but still nowadays our first identity comes from our parents. At the same time, to be free doesn’t mean actually to do *everything* someone wants: if we do something not at our level (not good as we are because of our dignity), we depreciate ourselves. In fact, as mentioned before, to be responsible means to respond – as in to correspond – through our actions to our dignity. We must remember the ancient doctrine of “practical action” (coming from Aristotle): if we act well, we become better (because we attain virtue); if we do badly, we become worse (because we pick up vices).

This is the challenge: to be able to choose only what is good, in order to be responsible, but how is it possible to do so in such a way? At this point, really, we understand why liberty is *freedom*, that is self-dominion. It isn’t spontaneous; it is necessary to learn how to do it; we must get the inner strength not to choose the worst, but to choose only the best. That is why the most ancient moral tale within Western culture is that of *Hercules at the crossroads*, where the hero (famed for his physical strength) is challenged to show moral strength, to prefer virtue to vice. Educational authority aims to make able to place limits on one’s conduct in order to lead to only the best. How can it happen? Through the conduct of an educator. In fact, at the beginning, the human being is totally under the power of narcissism: kids look for pleasure only. To grow means to become able to put the spontaneous desire of pleasures under the evaluation about the good or the evil concerning what we are aiming for and desire. Self-control is necessary to reach the goal, we learn it by experiencing the limits imposed by educators.

There is one last question: in which way can we discern the difference between authority and authoritarianism? Only the first is coherent with the goals of education, because to be authoritarian means to be a tyrant, and no tyrant ever made anyone free. Two differences must be recognized. First of all, educators have authority because, when they place limits on something, they first respect them. If I say to do something but I don’t do it, I act as a tyrant fixing laws only to others (the subjects). That’s why to be an educator means to carry the weight of

authority, to practice the coherence between what we say must be done and what we actually do. There is another criterion related to the authority as a means and not as an end. As mentioned earlier, educational authority aims to make pupils able to choose only the best, so the goal is the life of the person under education. That is why the limits set by the educator must always be in service to the growing person: limits aren't allowed to damage the physical/intellectual/moral integrity of the pupil. St. Paul's epistolary is clear about the issue when it gives to fathers – the most authoritative figure within the ancient world – the advice not to exasperate their children (Ephesians 6: 4; Colossians 3: 21). The Bible, even within its hardest pages, testifies to a God interested in giving help to man, even when faced with the “original sin” when God offers skin tunics to Adam and Eve when they are aware that they are naked (Genesis 3: 21). In short: to put limits must aim to make someone free and imbued with self-control. The challenge is to free from self-referential narcissism. It is a goal fully coherent with a very Christian message:

And turning to the mass of people with his disciples, he said to them. If any man has the desire to come after me, let him give up all other desires, and take up his cross and come after me. Whoever has a desire to keep his life, will have it taken from him; and whoever gives up his life because of me and the good news, will keep it (Mark 8: 34–35).

Catholic education aims to make people be able to live as God's children

Throughout the history of the Church, only one Encyclical Letter was devoted to Christian education: *Divini illius magistri* by Pius XI (1929). Despite the time which has passed, the papal document still has much to offer. In fact, it was published in order to reject the tyrannical aim (clearly expressed by Fascist, Nazi and Communist governments) of placing public education under their control. Pius XI rejected the idea by remarking the “natural educational right of family”. Obviously, totalitarianism is always the strongest enemy of personal and communitarian freedom because it aims to impose only the power of State, Party etc. Every time it happens there is the challenge



of ideology against reality. Because of their sins, also Christian people are at risk of practicing ideology. That is why John Paul II, within the Homily of the “Day of Pardon” (12.03.2000), says:

Let us forgive and ask forgiveness! While we praise God who, in his merciful love, has produced in the Church a wonderful harvest of holiness, missionary zeal, total dedication to Christ and neighbour, we cannot fail to recognize *the infidelities to the Gospel committed by some of our brethren*, especially during the second millennium. Let us ask pardon for the divisions which have occurred among Christians, for the violence some have used in the service of the truth and for the distrustful and hostile attitudes sometimes taken towards the followers of other religions. Let us confess, even more, *our responsibilities as Christians for the evils of today*. We must ask ourselves what our responsibilities are regarding atheism, religious indifference, secularism, ethical relativism, the violations of the right to life, disregard for the poor in many countries. We humbly ask forgiveness for the part which each of us has had in these evils by our own actions, thus helping to disfigure the face of the Church.¹⁶

The Church – as Christ’s bride – isn’t at risk because, being joined to Christ, it escapes every ideological reductionism: Christians are at risk of ideology because they are at risk of committing sins.

As mentioned above, the child is “free” by definition (in Latin, children are *liberi*, that is “free”). On the other hand, the most ancient way to make someone recognized as endowed with rights was through membership of a family (generally an aristocratic family). Obviously, this was an archaic and class-signed mentality: even so, the democratic situation of today has not dispensed with this attitude but has rather enlarged it. In fact, we are who we are – first of all – because we were born from our father and from our mother.

Genetic identity, however, does not suffice and, in fact, our liberty makes us to go beyond genetic and environmental conditions. It is our originality, coming from freedom and moral responsibility which is the property peculiar to man. That is why the Church always rejected the confusion between unity and uniformity, aiming to be a polyphonic community as it is well expressed by the ancient adage: *In necessariis unitas, in dubiis libertas, in omnibus charitas* (“Unity within what

¹⁶ John Paul II, *Homily* (12.03.2000), 4.

is essential, liberty within what is not completely clear, charity within everything”). That is why “the one Catholic Church” embraces many rites with disciplines, liturgies and theologies which are also different. Pope Francis reminded us of it in the public audience on 17 September 2014: “the Church was born catholic, that is, ‘symphonic’ from her very origins, and can be only catholic, projected to evangelization and encounter with all.” Obviously, it doesn’t mean that every idea/action can be accepted. As it happens in every symphony, there is order, but – as it was said by a very important Catholic philosopher/theologian, Romano Guardini – it must be a “living order”¹⁷, not every noise is a musical sound!

Within Catholic education, it is necessary to recognize what truly makes it “Catholic”, that is to confess Jesus Christ as the Son of God according to the tradition preserved within the Catholic Church. Today, some set the Church against Christ, but it is a mistake both from the historical and the logical point of view. In fact, we actually know Jesus only because the Church preached him to us (historical issue) and the Church is linked to Christ (and vice versa) because it was founded by him through the “apostolic succession” (logical issue). To practise the “obedience of the faith”, with regard to these truths means to respond – i.e., to correspond – with our intelligence and will to our dignity to be “children of God” (John 1: 12).

To do so in such a way requires discipline, that is the ability to practise self-control and not to be subdued by irrational tendencies. This is why Pauline literature compares the Christian way of life to agonistic images like a fight (2 Timothy 4: 7) or a sporting competition (1 Corinthians 9: 24–27; 2 Timothy 4: 7). It is essential to make clear that no good choice is possible without effort. What can we say, in order to motivate this effort? To offer the conquest of oneself is very important because it is related to self-esteem. To remember that we are children of God means to find the strongest motivation to preserve oneself and the others. Catholic education, by making us able to act well through the conquest of virtue, makes us free as it asks for an obedience to the Truth: the Truth about God and about our divine filiation through Christ and the holy Baptism. Also nowadays – as Jesus said two thousand years ago – the “knowledge of what is true” makes us free (John 8: 32).

¹⁷ Cf. R. Guardini, *Learning the virtues*, Manchester NH 2013.



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